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## Mining the news for humor



Brave New Workshop

Lauren Anderson in "Spilling Me Softly" at Brave New Workshop

After combing the Internet, TV and radio for big news stories, the Brave New Workshop troupe takes a sideways glance at what's happening in the world.

By **GRAYDON ROYCE**, Star Tribune

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Isn't it sad that punditry has devolved into partisan screamfests?

If the Gulf of Mexico is filling with oil, it's

because Republican maniacs shout "Drill, baby, drill!" Or, it's because Democratic maniacs won't allow onshore drilling, where it's easier to cap the spigot.

And who do you side with on the mosque in Lower Manhattan? The tone-deaf idiots who don't see it as disrespecting the 9/11 dead, or the idiots who somehow don't understand religious freedom?

And so it goes; extremists have hijacked civil discourse. Isn't it sad?

Yes, if by sad you mean irresistibly hilarious.

The Brave New Workshop has rummaged through a summer's worth of current events for fodder in their new comedy revue, "Spilling Me Softly; or Once the Gulf Goes Black, It Never Goes Back."

Targets include the spill, California's Proposition 8 on gay marriage, the midterm elections, immigration, the Tea Party and the president himself. The show opens Friday in Minneapolis.

Actor/writer Josh Eakright talked recently about the show's theme, calling it a "cry for sanity." Pretty serious, that.

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"It's all in the characters, what they say or do," said Mike Fotis.

"A few times we do actual quotes," added Lauren Anderson, after Eakright had quoted Workshop founder Dudley Riggs' words: "Reality is always funnier than fiction."

Anything else?

"And a bird costume," Anderson said, drawing cries of "spoiler alert" from her castmates.

Eakright, Fotis, Anderson and actor/writers Joe Bozic and Bobby Gardner routinely grind the meat of daily events into comic sausage. With more than 500 ideas being thrown against the wall, not everything is going to stick -- nor should it.

"The conversation can get pretty tangential," Eakright said. "We had a 20-idea run on the NBA, the LeBron James thing."

"The state of the NBA discussion took up an entire afternoon," Fotis noted. "I don't know if any of it got in."

Then there are the news stories that seemed juicy, but already have grown tired. Such as?

"We thought the Petraeus-McChrystal stuff would be a huge story," Fotis said. "I mean, it was a big story, but it's not so much anymore."

"Mel Gibson," Anderson said.

"Lindsay Lohan going to jail," added Gardner.

And that's the peril of taking aim at news events. Although for this show, Fotis said he doesn't anticipate a lot of change during the three-month run. It's a concept show, he said, with a theme that depends on certain set pieces that have been decided in development.

## The messenger and the message

The cast depends on a variety of news sources. Fotis likes CNN and Huffington Post. Eakright mentioned Politifact, a project by the St. Petersburg Times newspaper. Gardner checks out the Guardian UK, and Bozic said Google is a good aggregator. When it comes to radio, they span the political gamut.

"I do as much radio as I can, from NPR to K-Talk," Eakright said.

"The farthest I can go to the right is Joe Soucheray," Fotis said.

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Eakright made the interesting point that right-wing radio is "rock 'n' roll," up-tempo and full of charisma. Gardner agreed, contrasting K-Talk's red-meat howlers with Gary Eichten, Minnesota Public Radio's "Midday" host.

"I love Gary Eichten," Fotis said. "He's like your favorite uncle telling you a story."

"But K-Talk is like your really crazy uncle," Gardner said, summoning an amusing and universal image.

When it comes to personalities, Anderson said she "loves Rachel Maddow" but also understands why Glenn Beck is so popular.

"In a very skeptical world, he seems very earnest," she said. "You look at him and see a grown man willing to cry and be affected by things. It's like seeing your dad crying at a wedding."

A staple whenever Brave New Workshop gets into politics or current events is the faux news show. Everyone agreed that the tradition will not be broken, despite the popularity of shows such as "The Daily Show" and "The Colbert Report" that flood the senses with that stuff.

"It's the best way to get topical jokes into the show," Bozic said.

"And the only news segment is in Spanish," Anderson said, again drawing rebukes of "spoiler alert" from her mates.

"No, no!" she protested. "You've got to give them kernels, little bits to get the audience in here."

Spoken like a real news tease.

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